TALKING POINTS FOR THE DCI

SOVIET LEADERSHIP POLITICS -- THE CONTINUING SOAP OPERA

A number of developments on the Soviet leadership front in recent weeks deserve passing note. None in isolation is particularly noteworthy; taken together they still fail to point toward conclusive resolution of succession or policy disputes. At most they suggest the continuing priority of the "old guard's" retention of control and stability at the top, however temporary, at the expense of clear policy choice.

> Chernenko's primacy as "chairman of the board" has been strengthened by a host of appearances and demonstrations.

> After a short period of apparent protocol slights -- perhaps to chastise him for pushing his luck in August during Chernenko's illness -- Gorbachev is clearly back in the status of heir apparent.

> Ustinov's continued illness -- cause unconfirmed, but looking increasingly terminal -- threatens to rock the delicate balance by opening the Ministry of Defense and a Politburo slot.

> Ogarkov seems to have settled into a senior command position, but his status remains enigmatic and rumors abound that his political fortunes are still open. Meanwhile, in a recent article, he both vilifies the US and touts the prospects for peace and arms control.

The Politburo made a major -- but not difficult -- tactical adjustment in deciding to reengage the US in the arms control dialogue. Its immediate objectives are political: To influence the Administration's priorities, the Congress, and the alliance. However, in neither foreign nor domestic affairs -- as indicated by Chernenko's statements, the 1985 Plan, and continuing argument about "contradictions" in Soviet society -- have the Soviets settled on a broad strategic line for the next five years. This will probably await the potentially lengthy process of succession and the conduct of the 27th CPSU Congress. Meanwhile, we can expect the Soviets to maintain rhetocial consistency among conflict priorities, but not to resolve or, if they can avoid it, confront basic issues.